SUMMA THEOLOGICA

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

1265–1274 and also known as the ***Summa Theologica*** or simply the ***Summa***) is the best-known work of
Thomas Aquinas
(c. 1225–1274). Although unfinished, the
Summa
is "one of the classics of the history of philosophy and one of the most influential works of Western literature."
[1]
It was intended as an instructional guide for theology students, including seminarians and the literate laity. It was a compendium of all of the main
theological
teachings of the
Catholic Church
. It presents the reasoning for almost all points of Christian theology in the West. The
Summa'
s topics follow a cycle: the
existence of God
; Creation, Man;
Man's purpose
;
Christ
; the
Sacraments
; and back to God.

The *Summa* is Aquinas' "most perfect work, the fruit of his mature years, in which the thought of his whole life is condensed". [2] Among non-scholars, the *Summa* is perhaps most famous for its five arguments for the existence of God, which are known as the "five ways" (
Latin
:
quinque viae
). The five ways, however, occupy under two pages of the

Summa'
s approximately 3,500 pages.

Throughout the *Summa*, Aquinas cites Christian , Muslim , Hebrew , and Pagan sources including but not limited to
Christian Sacred Scripture
,
Aristotle
,
Augustine of Hippo
,
Avicenna
,
Averroes
,
Al-Ghazali
,
Boethius
,
John of Damascus
,
Paul the Apostle
,
Dionysius the Areopagite
,
Maimonides
,
Anselm
,
Plato
,
Cicero
, and
Eriugena
.

The *Summa* is a more structured and expanded version of Aquinas's earlier *Summa contra Gentiles* , though these works were written for different purposes, the
Summa Theologiae
to explain the Christian faith to beginning theology students, and the
Summa contra Gentiles

to explain the Christian faith and defend it in hostile situations, with arguments adapted to the intended circumstances of its use, each article refuting a certain belief or a specific heresy
.
[3]

Aquinas conceived the *Summa* specifically as a work suited to beginning students: "Because a doctor of catholic truth ought not only to teach the proficient, but to him pertains also to instruct beginners. As the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 3: 1–2, *as to infants in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat*, our proposed intention in this work is to convey those things that pertain to the Christian religion, in a way that is fitting to the instruction of beginners."
[4]

It was while teaching at the Santa Sabina *studium provinciale*, the forerunner of the Santa Maria sopra Minerva *studium generale* and College of Saint Thomas, which in the 20th century would become the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Angelicum*, that Aquinas began to compose the *Summa*. He completed the *Prima Pars* (first part) in its entirety and circulated it in Italy before departing to take up his second regency as professor at the University of Paris (1269–1272).
[5]

Even today, both in Western and Eastern Catholic Churches, Orthodoxy, and the mainstream original Protestant denominations (Anglicanism and Episcopalianism, Lutheranism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism), it is very common for the Summa Theologica to be required or strongly urged reading, in whole or in part, for all those seeking ordination to the diaconate or priesthood, or to professed male or female religious life, or for laypersons studying philosophy and theology at the collegiate level.

The most accessible English translation of the work is that originally published by Benziger Brothers, in five volumes, in 1911 (with a revised edition published in 1920). The translation is entirely the work of Laurence Shapcote (1864-1947), an English Dominican friar. Wanting to

remain anonymous, however, the translation was attributed to the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Father Shapcote also translated various of Aquinas's other works. (See "Thomas Aquinas's 'Summa Theologiae': A Guide and Commentary" by Brian Davies [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. xiv].)

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